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The school system in Trigg County, Kentucky is one of the most throughly desegregated in the State because of a successful school pairing plan. Combining the attendance zones of Negro and white schools enabled the establishment of biracial schools with students divided by grade into different school buildings. A pairing plan, it was felt, would overcome de facto segregation. The 12 Negro teachers in the system retained their jobs and were placed in biracial classes. The smooth desegregation of the high school was helped by the transfer of top Negro athletes from the closed Negro high school. Appropriate curriculum changes, including the addition of reading programs, have been implemented in the desegregated schools. Under the determined leadership of the school superintendent and the school board, the integration process was accomplished without incident. In five other Kentucky counties the schools have been desegregated through pairing. (NH)

TRIGG COUNTY TRIED 'PAIRING,' AND IT WORKED

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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By Ward Sinclair

Kentucky is a state where "queens" are abundant. A "queen" contest can be arranged at the drop of a diadem. Beauties parade for every cause from burley tobacco to the mountain laurel. And basketball. They are big on basketball queens in Kentucky.

Last winter the students and athletes at Trigg County High School, in the far southwest corner of Kentucky, went through their yearly ritual of choosing a basketball queen. They chose a Negro.

That is one small chapter in a story that Supt. Roy McDonald, a gruff-talking man who wears a blue-gray shock of hair, relates with a pride he couldn't hide if he tried.

Four years before, Negroes didn't even attend high school in Trigg County. They were sent 20 miles down the road to an all-Negro high school in neighboring Christian County. Today the 1,900-pupil school system in little Trigg County (population: 8,500) is one of the most thoroughly desegregated in Kentucky. A fourth of its pupils are Negroes.

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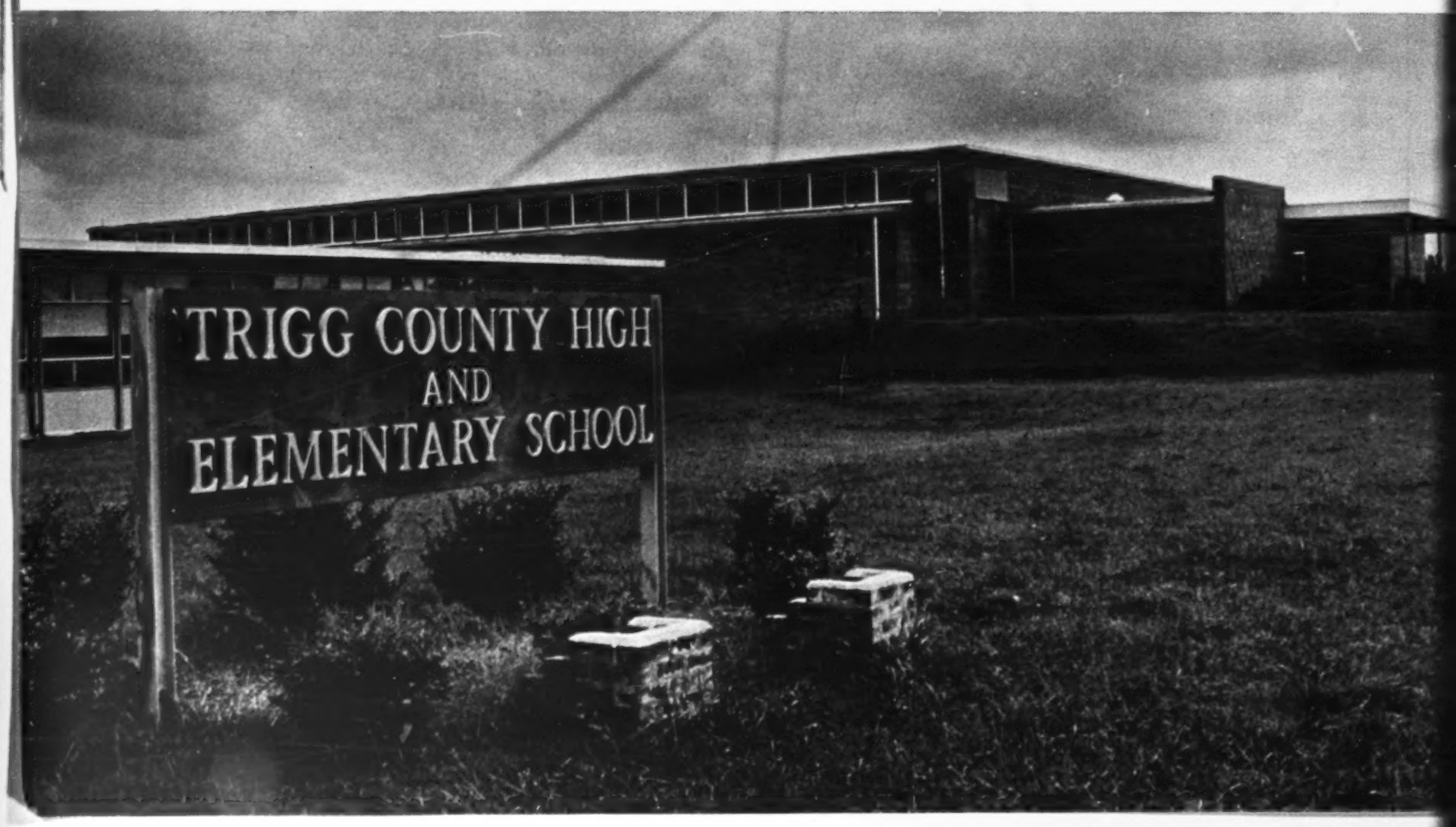

Trigg County and five other Kentucky districts have achieved that status by devising variations on a relatively new theme—school pairing. In short, this means combining attendance zones of nearby predominantly white and predominantly Negro schools, and then dividing the pupils by grade between the buildings.

The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights recently urged educators in other districts with predominantly Negro schools to take a close look at the "good examples" set by the six "pioneer" districts. The basic virtue of the pairing plans, the commission believes, is that they "overcome the inevitable *de facto* segregation produced by the earlier construction of schools on sites selected with the continuation of segregation in mind."

Kentucky, a border state, has virtually eliminated its dual school system. Last year, 90 per cent of its Negro pupils attended desegregated schools. But almost half of the state's 60,540 Negro pupils attended schools in which their race predominated. In some districts, freedom-of-choice plans were not bringing much desegregation. Residential patterns played another part in keeping schools segregated. Other districts showed little or no interest in changing *de facto* situations.

One, or a combination of several, of those factors existed in the six "pioneer" districts of Kentucky. With prodding from the federal government, encouragement from the state department of education and guidance from the federally supported Human Relations Center for Education at Western Kentucky University, the six moved.

The satisfaction Trigg County's Roy McDonald expresses with the pairing plan—and some bonus benefits he hadn't counted on—is echoed by administrators in the other five districts.

This is what happened in Trigg County:

For years the district operated a number of small segregated elementary schools. White high-school pupils attended classes in a central school at Cadiz, the county seat. Negroes were bused to high schools in adjacent counties. In 1959 a new elementary—McUpton School—was built in Cadiz for Negroes. It replaced a rundown Negro school and was seen by some as an effort to avoid desegregation.

But in 1960 the high school was ruined by fire. Officials at Hopkinsville, in adjacent Christian County, in the meantime said they could no longer accept Trigg County Negro pupils because of overcrowding. Trigg had to find a place at home for its Negroes.

So in 1962 a new 12-grade school, whose capacity coincided with the number of whites in the county, opened in Cadiz. Grades 9 through 12 were desegregated. In 1965 all seventh- and eighth-grade classes were consolidated on a desegregated basis in old buildings on the central school grounds. That left all Negroes in grades 1-6 in the McUpton School. Even though a freedom-of-choice plan existed, McDonald says there was "very little" participation in it.

"In 1966 we decided to get the whole situation over with," he said. "We looked at the two grades that would fill McUpton to capacity. We ended up putting our third and fourth grades there and brought all the rest to the central school." Trigg County calls the result a school park, although it is not that in the strictest sense. McUpton School is several blocks away. All other county pupils are on the one campus.

Before total desegregation, the county began grouping all its pupils according to reading ability. "We did it before we went to pairing," said McDonald. ". . . Thought it would be better not to start it afterward." Grouping has continued on a desegregated basis. Negro students, generally behind the whites before desegregation, have made strides in catching up, according to McDonald. Curriculum changes—adding remedial programs, for instance—have come about since desegregation got into full swing.

Before full desegregation began, a federal Civil Rights Act grant for in-service training helped teachers prepare for problems that might crop up. All of the system's 12 Negro teachers retained their jobs—in biracial classes—and the Negro principal remained in charge at McUpton.

McDonald said athletics helped smooth desegregation of the high school, especially when top Negro athletes helped win ball games for Trigg County. In the early days, the teams sometimes had difficulty getting served food on game trips. But that problem has ceased also.

"A lot of our citizens are not liking it (desegregation) and they'll die not liking it," McDonald said. "The people you have trouble with are the parents. But students have blended right in and we've not had one incident since this all began."

Adults have expressed themselves various ways. When pairing went into effect last fall, some of the older Cadiz residents were offended at the sight of Negro pupils walking down Main Street to what had been the all-white elementary. So McDonald provided buses. That lasted only briefly. Some white parents

The school officials who put Trigg County's pairing plan into effect are (left to right) Edward L. Oates, principal of McUpton School; Arthur Wallace, principal of Trigg Elementary School; Supt. Roy McDonald; John Randolph, principal of Trigg County High School, and Paul Gardner Jr., principal of Trigg County Junior High School.

objected to their third- and fourth-graders being sent to classes in the formerly Negro school in a mainly Negro residential area. The children have had no difficulty. Some Negroes resisted the closing of the all-Negro elementary school because they thought they would lose a community meeting place. That did not happen.

All the while, Sheriff Zelner Cossey kept an eye on the situation—from a distance. He and his deputies stayed away when total desegregation came about. "Anticipating isn't worth a darn," he commented. "You just ask for trouble."

Mrs. Flora Sholer, a Negro housewife, talked about that as she rocked gently in a chair on her front porch. "It's all worked out real well. Everybody gets along fine from what I hear . . . and the kids have a better opportunity for a better education. Now, if they hadn't given jobs to our teachers I wouldn't have liked that. But they did and I'm so glad it was done without any trouble." Her daughter, who used to travel to another county for her high-school classes, added: "It worked because the people in Cadiz are Christian people."

McDonald said he and the school board took one position throughout: "You've got to be above board with your public. Let them know what you're doing. We never pulled any punches or hid anything. We said, 'Here's the problem and here's how we're going to solve it.' I've said all along that everybody in Trigg County is going to be treated right and equal. Nobody can quarrel with that."

Trigg County was doing some bold things—bold for the time and the place—some 20 years ago. When McDonald became superintendent in 1946 he desegregated the teacher in-service programs without trouble. Then he made sure that Negro and white teachers were paid equal salaries. They got equal allotments of classroom supplies and equipment. This was not the case in some other districts of the state.

According to the rights commission, results similar to those in Trigg County have been noted in the other districts that turned to pairing.

Decreasing enrollment in the Negro schools and the subsequent crowding of predominantly white schools had added to operations expenses for the Hopkins County system. Supt. Crompton Crowe reported better use of facilities and greater economies after pairing was put into effect. Dr. James Graham, Nelson County superintendent, found that solution of the desegregation problem, through pairing, gave him more time to work on other pressing issues. Meanwhile, the educational program was revamped and the primary grades went onto a "levels" system, allowing pupils to work at their own paces.

Pairing at Paducah permitted Dr. Newman Walker, superintendent, to departmentalize his faculties—making teachers specialists in their strongest subjects. Todd County's pairing system involved dividing pupils of one school among three buildings in the Elkton community, with first-graders in a building by themselves. At Glasgow, the former Negro elementary school became a center for sixth-graders—which Supt. Edwin J. Mayes said allows the system to prepare these youngsters better for entrance into junior high by separating them from smaller children.

In all cases, Negro teachers were retained by the districts and all, according to the rights commission, were given legitimate classroom teaching assignments. In some cases, they were promoted.

Some grumbling about the changes—by both white and Negro parents—was reported from some of the districts, but it was no more than grumbling. In most

cases the plans were devised quietly, with little fanfare, and once the school boards had made up their minds, they stuck to their guns.

That was the way it worked in Trigg County, said schoolboard member Cleland White Jr., pausing to talk recently in his hardware store in Cadiz. There wasn't much doubt that the children would get along well, he said. One other thing that came about through pairing, he added, "was that integration has helped all our teachers professionally . . . they are better teachers today. It is a challenge to them. They're competing, in a sense."

Then he said: "You know, we got an excellent Negro first-grade teacher through desegregation. I hope my boy gets her when he reaches school." O